

Oak Grove Church of Christ Newsletter - 2023.04.02

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Sermon recordings

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Speaker-AM: Steve Helterbrand

Title: Open Minds, Doors, And Hearts

Recording:

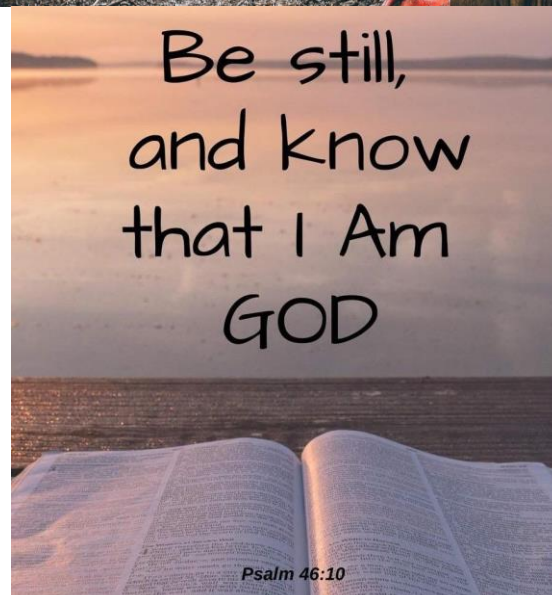
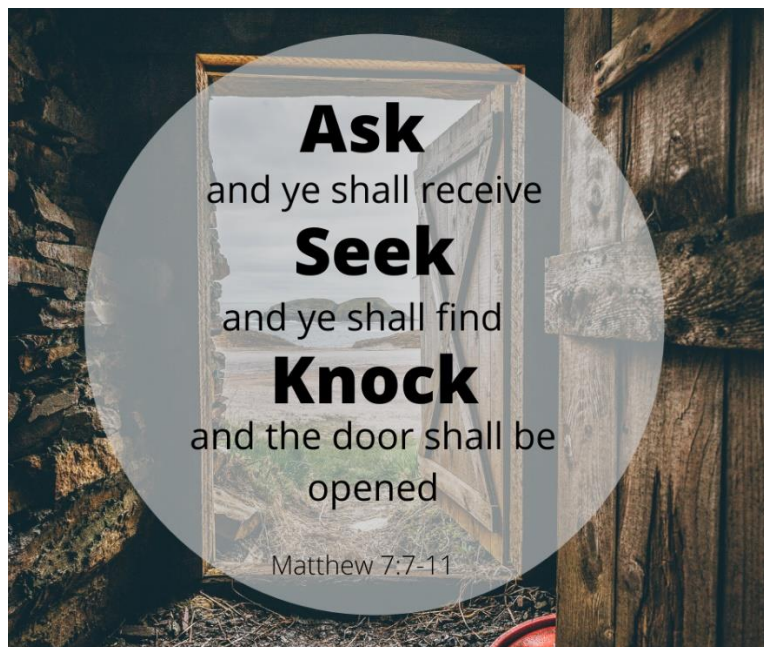
tinyurl.com/SteveOpenMinds

Speaker-PM: Kraig Benney

Title: Be Still And Know

Recording:

tinyurl.com/KraigBeStill



Finding Real Happiness, 03/23/2023 By Richard Thetford

Everyone wants a life filled with joy and happiness, but very few find it. One major reason man fails to find the happiness he seeks is that he is trying to obtain it through the wrong means. Millionaires who have houses, yachts, and condominiums often complain in counseling sessions that they're so unhappy they often think about committing suicide. They have everything money can buy, but they're unhappy with their lives! There's a void in their hearts that has never been filled -- a thirst that has never been satisfied.

Those with college degrees are often unhappy. Physicians, lawyers, and educators often admit that they are very unhappy. This proves that higher education in and of itself doesn't bring happiness. Anyone who is trying to find happiness through wealth, position, education, or notoriety is looking in the wrong place.

The void that people have in their hearts can only be filled through a relationship with the Lord Himself. Jesus stated in John 4:13-14, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

Only the Lord can fill the deepest longings of the heart. Proverbs 3:5-8 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones."

The Hound of Heaven, 03/26/2023 By Rick Lanning

Do you remember this quote? “No one is good but God.”

Most readers will immediately think of Jesus’ reply to the rich young ruler who had run to the Lord, fell on his knees, and asked, “Good teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” Christ jolted this self-righteous man with this question and comment, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but One, that is, God” (Mark 10:17-18; cf. Matthew 19:16-17 and Luke 18:18-19).

Jesus was not denying He was “good,” but was forcing this young man to think deeper about the one to Whom he was asking that question. It would be like Pontius Pilate asking Jesus, “What is truth?” (John 18:38). We all know John’s famous quote from the Lord, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Pilate was staring “Truth” in the face. And this young ruler was staring “Good” (i.e. God) in the face. Thus, whatever Jesus was about to say to him would be equal to the voice on Mt. Sinai that thundered, smoked, quaked, trumpeted, and flashed lightning bolts as it revealed the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 19:16-18). When God speaks, “the Lord is in His holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before Him” (Habakkuk 2:20).

When we think of the attributes (qualities or characteristics) of God we must think so much deeper than we often do. To say that God is omniscient is to say much more than simply He is “all-knowing.” Albert Einstein was brilliant, as were Nicola Tesla and Thomas Edison, but they had to reason and think through all their theories and inventions, making hundreds, even thousands, of mistakes. Remember, it was Edison who famously said, “I have not failed 10,000 times inventing the light bulb, I have found 10,000 ways that did not work.” Compare that to God, who simply ordered, “Let there be light, and there was light” (Genesis 1:3). He didn’t have to experiment or think about how to create either light or the entire universe (Psalms 19:1-6).

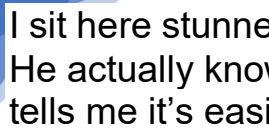
Best of all God did not have to think about the scheme of redemption to save us from our sins! He just knew it from the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34; Hebrews 4:3; Ephesians 3:11). Saying God is omniscient is not saying He is “smarter” than everyone else. It is saying He is the source of all wisdom! He is the epitome, the very embodiment of truth. All true knowledge is personified in God. In other words, without God, there is no Einstein or Edison! There is no Solomon! (I Kings 3). Paul said it best: “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” (Romans 11:33). The same could be said for all these other attributes of God:

- God is omnipotent. All power and authority come from God (Psalms 33:6; Matthew 28:18).
- God is omnipresent. He is always, at all times, everywhere (Psalms 139:7-10).
- God is omnibenevolent. All that is good comes from God (James 1:17).
- God is faithful. Semper Fidelis. He never lies or breaks a promise (Deuteronomy 7:9).
- God is holy. He is separate, sacred, glorious, and infinitely unlike any other being (Revelation 4:8).
- God is just. He is unchangeably right and perfect in every decision or judgment (Deuteronomy 32:4).
- God is righteous. He cannot be wrong, but always right in everything (Psalms 11:7).
- God is sovereign. He rules the universe within His permissive will (Ephesians 1:11).
- God is immutable. God never changes because He is already perfect (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8).
- God is self-sufficient. He needs nothing from anyone (John 5:26).
- God is Love.

I had to tell you all these other attributes before I could begin to tell you about God's love. Thank God, His great power is based on love. His all-seeing eye is too. So is His impartial benevolence, faithfulness, holiness, justice, righteousness, and sovereignty. Just think of it, His immutability means He is never moody, He always, at all times, loves me! Love is the motive behind all God is and does. Listen very carefully and you will hear a collective sigh of relief from all the redeemed, both on earth and in Hades.

God, who is self-sufficient, and needs nothing from us, has allowed His heart to be emotionally identified with us mortals. His love is not passive, but passionately active, pursuing us until He has us. Indeed, as Paul impressed upon the Athenians, God "gives to all life, breath, and all things... so that they might grope for Him, and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:25-27).

English poet Francis Thompson wrote a poem in 1890 called "The Hound of Heaven." It was about God's relentless pursuit of him as a prodigal son. Just as a hound tracks the hare until it's caught, so God stays on our trail relentlessly until we are found. It is the very phrase C. S. Lewis used to describe himself as "God's most reluctant convert." It seems very likely Saul of Tarsus would have used that same description from his own conversion as the "chief of sinners" (read I Timothy 1:13-17). We could all say the same.



I sit here stunned. God doesn't love me in a vague, impersonal sense. He loves me! He actually knows my name, it's right there written on the palm of His hand. In fact, He tells me it's easier for a nursing mother to forget her infant child than it is for His love to forget me (Isaiah 49:15-16). He loves me fully, sinful warts and all! That stretches my imagination to its very limit.

Fredrick Lehman, in 1917, working in a packing factory putting oranges in crates, meditated on a sermon he heard the night before on God's love. Words came to him and he rushed home to pen this beautiful hymn we have now sung for a century.

The love of God is greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell;
It goes beyond the highest star, and reaches to the lowest hell;
The guilty pair, bowed down with care, God gave His Son to win;
His erring child He reconciled, and pardoned from his sin.
Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill, and every man a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above, would drain the ocean dry.
Nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky.

If that poem stirs you, just read Paul's inspired poem about the loving heart of God:

"For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:31-39).

Jesus once touched the untouchables, unclean lepers who were the walking dead (Luke 5:12-16). That's love. Better still, Jesus has touched me, who suffered a fate worse than leprosy. I was an outcast sinner condemned to hell. But He came into my lonely world and hugged me, saying, "I love you."

I weep with joy, for the hound of heaven found me. Has He found you?